Teaching in the Yukon

An information handbook
for prospective teachers

Yukon
Government

TEACHING IN THE YUKON

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The Yukon Education System

Introduction

The Department of Education is responsible for most aspects of school operations in the Yukon. The Yukon has a population of 30,470 people who live in an area of 480,000 square kilometres, about five per cent of the total area of Canada. Approximately 5400 students are enrolled in 28 publicly funded schools. Instruction is English-based for the majority of students in Kindergarten through Grade 12. French Immersion and French First Language education is also available in Whitehorse.

The Yukon Act and the Education Act provide the legal framework and authority for the development and delivery of Catholic Education. The three Catholic schools in Whitehorse are part of the Yukon public school system and an applicant for a teaching position in these schools is required to produce a current Roman Catholic pastoral reference.

The Education Act provides for the establishment of School Councils and School Boards and for guaranteed representation of The Yukon's First Nations. The Education Act also makes provision for special education, including the procedures for determining the special needs of a student. The Act prohibits corporal punishment and provides for the mandatory reporting of child abuse.

The British Columbia program of studies forms the basis of the Yukon curriculum. This curriculum is frequently adapted, however, to reflect local needs and conditions. The Department of Education is a full partner in the Western Canadian Protocol (WCP) project to provide a common curriculum framework within the educational jurisdictions of Western Canada.

Local Governance

The Education Act provides for the establishment and operation of several governing bodies within the education system. Most are advisory in nature, but some have quasi-judicial powers and operate more or less independently of the Department of Education.

School Councils have some, but not all, of the powers of a school board, including the following:

- Reviewing and approving school objectives, school policies, educational spending, courses of study and other matters required for the effective functioning of the school;
- Recommending how the discretionary portion of the school budget should be allocated;
- Selecting the school principal;
- Establishing a procedure for resolving disputes involving the school, parents and teachers;
- Establishing an attendance policy for students; and
- Reviewing and approving school rules.

School Boards have many of the administrative powers of the Department of Education. Unlike School Boards in other jurisdictions, however, Yukon School Boards do not have the authority to tax, and all staff remain employees of the Government of Yukon. At present, there is only one school board in the Yukon, the Yukon Francophone School Board.

Yukon Public Schools
Enrollment October, 2004

School	Location	Enrollment	Grades
Whitehorse			
Christ the King Elementary School	Whitehorse	314	K-7
École Émilie-Tremblay	Whitehorse	121	K-12
Elijah Smith Elementary School	Whitehorse	276	K-7
F.H. Collins Secondary School	Whitehorse	648	8-12
Golden Horn Elementary School	Whitehorse	207	K-7
Grey Mountain Primary School	Whitehorse	68	K-3
Hidden Valley School	Whitehorse	104	K-7
Holy Family Elementary School	Whitehorse	163	K-7
Jack Hulland Elementary School	Whitehorse	336	K-7
Porter Creek Secondary School	Whitehorse	802	8-12
Selkirk Elementary School	Whitehorse	225	K-7
Takhini Elementary School	Whitehorse	171	K-7
Vanier Catholic Secondary School	Whitehorse	418	8-12
Whitehorse Elementary School	Whitehorse	357	K-7
North of Whitehorse			
Chief Zzeh Gittlit School	Old Crow	44	K-10
Del Van Gorder School	Faro	54	K-12
Eliza Van Bibber School	Pelly Crossing	68	K-12
J.V. Clark School	Mayo	83	K-12
Robert Service School	Dawson City	239	K-12
Ross River School	Ross River	64	K-10
Tantalus School	Carmacks	100	K-12
West of Whitehorse			
Beaver Creek School	Beaver Creek	12	K-9
Kluane Lake School	Destruction Bay	7	K-8
St. Elias Community School	Haines Junction	129	K-12
East of Whitehorse			
Carcross Community School	Carcross	62	K-9
Johnson Elementary School	Watson Lake	155	K-7
Teslin School	Teslin	68	K-9
Watson Lake Secondary School	Watson Lake	121	8-12

The Yukon Teacher

Teachers in Yukon Public Schools are employees of the Department of Education, Government of Yukon. The goal of the Yukon education system is to work in co-operation with parents to develop the whole child to the extent of their abilities so that they may become productive, responsible, and self-reliant members of society while leading personally rewarding lives in a changing world. The Department of Education is committed to lifelong learning.

Qualifications and Certificates

An applicant for a teaching position in the Yukon must possess or be eligible for a valid teaching certificate from a Canadian province, and receive Yukon certification.

The basic requirements for a Professional Yukon Certificate are:

a) An approved four-year or five-year Bachelor of Education degree from a recognized university or college, or
An approved baccalaureate degree from a recognized university or college and an approved program of teacher preparation of not less than one academic year, from a recognized university or college

and

b) One course (6 credits) of university or college studies, acceptable to the Registrar, of which at least 1/2 course must be in Yukon or northern Canadian studies and any balance must be in multicultural education or the sociological and philosophical foundations of education within the culture of the Yukon First Nations.

Teachers who do not meet the requirements outlined in Section (b) may be granted a Professional Certificate on an interim basis for not more than two years, pending completion of course requirements. Courses are available through Yukon College.

Teacher Qualification Board

The Teacher Qualification Board assesses and certifies levels of professional attainment. The categories issued by the Board are used for salary placement purposes and are similar to those employed by most western Canadian jurisdictions.

Category IV — successful completion of four years of academic or professional training

Category V — successful completion of five years of academic or professional training, and possession of a Baccalaureate degree

Category VI — successful completion of six years of academic or professional training, and possession of a Master's degree

School Calendars

Local School Councils have some flexibility in organizing the school year. The majority of schools choose a starting date near the end of August or early September and a closing date near mid-June. There is a Christmas vacation of two weeks and at least a one-week Spring Break in mid-March. For contract purposes, the employment year is considered to be from September 1 to August 31.

Salaries

Salaries are based on a combination of the teacher's years of post-secondary education (professional preparation) and years of teaching experience acceptable to the Department of Education. Teachers are paid an average proportion of their annual salary on a biweekly basis. For more details see 'Excerpts from the Collective Agreement' contained in this package.

Teachers Salary Schedule, Effective July 1, 2005

Years of Experience	Category II	Category III	Category IV	* Category V	* Category VI
0	39,089	44,448	51,974	55,931	57,836
1	40,750	46,361	54,419	58,423	60,361
2	42,405	48,242	56,865	60,898	62,881
3	44,063	50,185	59,313	63,385	65,408
4	45,718	52,097	61,760	65,872	67,930
5	47,380	54,008	64,208	68,360	70,457
6	49,037	55,920	66,653	70,846	72,981
7	50,696	57,836	69,100	73,334	75,504
8	52,352	59,750	71,550	75,821	78,030
9	54,008	61,656	74,004	78,306	80,551
10	55,665	63,572	76,451	80,795	83,082

Yukon Bonus and Northern Taxation Allowance

To offset some of the costs of living in the Yukon, residents are eligible for a Northern Residence income tax deduction of up to $450 per month. This is claimed as part of your income tax return at calendar year end. In addition, government employees receive vacation travel assistance when they complete their second and subsequent years of employment. This latter benefit is $2,042 a year. Travel expenses can be deducted from this benefit when preparing your tax return. Also, teachers assigned to schools outside Whitehorse receive a community allowance that currently ranges from $500 to $3,000 per year.

Moving Expenses

The Department of Education has a generous package to assist teachers with the cost of relocation.

Accommodation

Teachers hired for rural Yukon schools are usually offered rental accommodation provided by the Yukon Housing Corporation. Accommodation in rural communities (communities outside Whitehorse) is modest and will vary considerably in terms of type, quality and quantity. Rental costs also vary from community to community. Tenants should expect to pay full charges for utility connections, telephone and heating oil deposits in addition to the cost of fuel and electricity. Rents for public housing are established by the Yukon Housing Corporation and not by the Department of Education. Government housing is not provided in Whitehorse as the private sector real estate market can meet this demand. Private sector housing is also available in some larger rural communities.

Appointment of Teachers and Administrators

All teachers and administrators are placed on probation for two years from the date of commencement of employment. Vice-principals are appointed as teachers and assigned as vice-principals.

Transfer Policy

It is the employer's policy that Yukon teachers with three years' experience in the same school will receive preferential consideration for posted teaching positions.

Resignations

Teachers who wish to resign must provide a minimum of 30 days' written notice. Notice of resignation by a teacher may not be given in the 90-day period prior to the beginning of a new school year.

Pension Plan

Every teacher employed by the Government of Yukon appointed for any period of time of greater than six months and who is required to work 12 hours or more per week, is required to contribute to the Superannuation Plan.

Contributions are required, at the rate of 4% of salary up to the Canada Pension Plan maximum pensionable earnings and 7 1/2% of salary after that. The plan provides the employee with a pension for retirement, or disability or a benefit to the employee's spouse or dependents in the event of the employee's death. The employer also contributes an amount on behalf of the employee to the Superannuation Account.

Reciprocity Agreements

The Pension Transfer Agreement (PTA) provides the authority to transfer pension funds and benefits between employers. Should there not be a pension transfer agreement in place with a former employer, newly hired Government of Yukon employees must write their former employer to indicate interest in having a PTA negotiated.

A pension transfer can be beneficial in two ways: both the employer and the employee contributions are transferred; and all pension benefits are maintained in one place. A point to note is that many pension plans require a lower rate of contribution than the Superannuation Plan. As a result, a teacher may find that a shorter period is credited in the transfer than the actual service worked. A teacher may elect to purchase the balance of service not transferred by making monthly payments over a period of time.

Group Life Insurance

Supplementary Death Benefit: Teachers who contribute to the Superannuation Plan are also required to participate in the Supplementary Death Benefit plan. This is a type of decreasing term life insurance designed to cover the employee and his/her beneficiary during the years while building up a pension. The plan provides a benefit equal to twice the annual salary.

Basic Life Insurance: Teachers also participate in the Basic Life Insurance plan, which provides life insurance coverage at an additional two times their annual salary.

Long Term Disability Insurance

Long Term Disability Insurance is an important part of the income replacement protection for employees. It provides a monthly income benefit for employees who are unable to work for an extended period of time due to illness or injury. Employees pay 25% of premiums and the employer pays 75% of premiums.

Yukon Health Care Insurance Plan

Enrollment in the Yukon Health Care Insurance Plan is compulsory for all employees. The plan covers a range of services and benefits including those provided by general practitioners and medical specialists (some specific dental services may also be included). A premium is not charged.

Yukon residents are covered from the first day of the third month following the month of arrival but an applicant must be registered by the end of the month following the month of arrival.

Employees of the Government of Yukon residing in the Yukon are eligible for Yukon Hospital Insurance Services. Hospital care is provided under this plan, but coverage does not include convalescent nursing home or custodial care, transportation costs, or accounts payable for private nurses. Eligibility for Yukon Hospital Insurance Services is identical to eligibility under the Yukon Health Care Insurance Plan.

Dental Care Plan

The Dental Care plan covers 100% for routine dental work and 50% for major dental work, with some limits and deductibles. Teachers are required to participate after an initial waiting period, although coverage for dependents can be declined if they are covered under another plan.

The monthly premium rates established under the terms of the policy are cost-shared in accordance with provisions of the Yukon Teachers' Association Collective Agreement. Employees pay 15% of premiums and the employer pays 85% of premiums.

Extended Health Care Plan

The Extended Health Care Plan provides coverage for medically-necessary expenses over and above those covered by the Yukon Health Care Insurance Plan. Coverage includes a Drug Benefit, Vision Care, Hospital Benefit, Travel Assistance, and other Miscellaneous Health Care coverage.

Teachers are required to participate after an initial waiting period, although coverage for dependents can be declined if they are covered under another plan.

The monthly premium rates established under the terms of the policy are cost-shared in accordance with provisions of the Yukon Teachers' Association Collective Agreement. Employees pay 25% of premiums and the employer pays 75% of premiums.

Leave and Attendance

Leave benefits provided to teachers include paid time off for illness, for some personal circumstances, and travel bonus days for rural teachers.

Severance and Retirement Benefits

Yukon teachers have unique severance and retirement benefits.

On resignation, teacher with five or more years of continuous service are entitled to a severance package equal to one-half the weekly rate of pay times the number of years of service.

Upon retirement, teachers with five or more years continuous service are eligible to be paid their full weekly rate of pay times the number of years of service. They can also claim pre-retirement leave immediately prior to retirement up to one-third of their unused sick leave benefits to a maximum of sixty days, or they can elect a cash payment in lieu of pre-retirement leave.

Collective Agreement Overview

Teachers in the Yukon have their own professional organization, the Yukon Teachers' Association. All teachers must belong to this Association. The Association has the legal right to negotiate salaries and working conditions for Yukon teachers. This is accomplished by means of a Collective Agreement between the Government of Yukon and the Yukon Teachers' Association. The Agreement contains a number of important features including restriction on class sizes, eligibility of employees for paid maternity and adoption leave, a provision for "preparation time" for teachers, a deferred salary leave plan, and a Professional Development fund which includes special incentives for rural teachers.

To contact the Yukon Teachers' Association please write:

Yukon Teachers' Association
2064 – 2nd Avenue
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 1A9
Phone: (867) 668-6777
Fax: (867) 667-4324

Yukon Curriculum and School Based Programs

The Yukon Department of Education establishes the curriculum and general philosophy of education. Teacher committees with the cooperation of department personnel frequently carry out program development and course changes. In addition, provision is made for the introduction of locally developed courses for which prior approval has been given. Yukon schools follow the British Columbia program of studies, and students write the British Columbia Provincial Examinations.

Curriculum Services

The Department of Education provides extensive curriculum support. Curriculum consultants with varied specialties, expertise and experience are in regular contact with schools. Curriculum consultants visit schools frequently and provide resources and inservicing to teachers. Yukon consultants are experienced classroom teachers ready to assist teachers in a broad range of subject areas and at all grade levels.

Special Programs

Students with special needs are educated in the least restrictive and most enabling environment possible. In practice this means that special needs students are educated in the regular classrooms with appropriate program modifications to meet their needs.

Yukon schools develop school-based programs to address the educational needs of all students. Students with mild academic and behavioral difficulties are served through the Learning Assistance Program. In addition, learning assistance teachers provide differentiated learning opportunities for gifted and talented learners.

Special Programs consultants include school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists and personnel who specialize in assisting children with physical handicaps. The Special Programs unit coordinates the activities of school-based teams to ensure that assessments provide for student needs and that students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) receive the required support.

There are specialized resource programs in some schools to provide alternative environments for students who are unable to profit from education in a regular classroom setting. These include programs for students with intellectual impairment, students with multiple handicaps and students with emotional or behavioral difficulties.

Resource Services

Resource Services provides a comprehensive range of curriculum services from a central location. Resource Services distributes all (K-12) English and French language curriculum materials, curriculum-based computer software, novels, supplementary literature sets, administrative supplies, testing materials and departmental examinations. Approved textbooks are available through the Catalogue of Curriculum Materials and Le Catalogue du matérial pédagogique, both published annually, and provided to all teachers. These catalogues are also published on the Resource Services web site.

Resource Services maintains a curriculum-based collection of several thousand audiovisual items, including more than 5,000 educational videotapes. Copies of the Catalogue of Media Resources and Catalogue du ressources audiovisuelles are in every school.

These resources can be accessed through the web site www.resourceservices.gov.yk.ca.

Book and periodical acquisition budgets, and cataloguing and processing for school libraries are provided centrally. Consultant services to Teacher-Librarians are also available. All Yukon school library collections can be searched through the Web site.

The Teachers' Professional Library is located at Resource Services. This professional print collection provides curriculum-based support in every subject area and at every level. This collection is also available through the Web site.

Reading Recovery™

Reading Recovery™ is a highly specialized reading program, focussed on academically at-risk six-year-old children. This "one-on-one" approach accelerates the student's ability to learn to read and permits the child to be an independent problem-solving reader. Reading Recovery™ is offered in almost every school in Yukon.

Experiential Learning

At the Secondary School Level, there are several programs that constitute a "school within a school". These include:

- ACES 10 (Achievement, Challenge, Environment, Service)
  This outdoor program combines academic class work with Yukon-based experiential projects both in and out of school.

- MAD 9/10; 11/12 (Music, Art and Drama)
  This program stresses creativity and fosters skills in English, drama, dance, art and music.

- EXPERIENTIAL SCIENCE 9, 11
  This program includes outdoor pursuits (canoeing, kayaking, hiking, and climbing). In the science course students will be involved in field studies and field trips. The physical education component emphasizes participation in lifelong activities. Students will have classes in the computer labs and will learn new technologies and computer applications.

- PASE (Plein air et Sciences experimentales 9)
  This program is offered in French and combines academic class work with practical field study projects. The latter include wildlife population studies; hiking trips; river kayak sessions in the pool; snow study trip; climbing activities; sea kayak trip; native cultural camp.

- FEAST (Foods Education and Service Training)
  This program is designed for the serious Foods student, those with a high interest in food preparation, chef's training, dietetics and careers in the hospitality-tourism industry.

Information Technology

Yukon is the most 'connected' educational jurisdiction in Canada. Yukon schools have high-speed Internet access both in the schools' computer labs and in most classrooms.

The Information Communication Technology curriculum fosters the development of skills and attitudes needed for students to make informed decisions when using technology and to reflect critically on technology's role in society. Students are encouraged to view technology as a tool to be used to extend and complement their learning experiences in other subject areas.

The use of technology and the teaching of information communication technology skills are integrated within the existing curricular areas in grades K - 10. Information Communications Technology 11 and 12 are offered as optional courses to senior high school students.

YESNet (Yukon Education Student Network) provides web-hosting services for public schools and YESNet's FirstClass Communications System provides all teachers and senior secondary students with an integrated email and conferencing system. http://www.yesnet.yk

First Nations content in the Yukon Curriculum

The Yukon Education Act mandates an emphasis on First Nations' language and culture, not just for First Nations' students, but for all Yukon young people. The goal is to develop a positive and working relationship with individual Yukon First Nations, including Yukon First Nations Elders Council, Yukon Native Language Center and Yukon Native Teacher Education Program.

As part of the Western Canada Protocol (WCP) Agreement, a Curriculum Framework for aboriginal language instruction has been developed. The framework specifies the sequential development of language skills for each grade level from Kindergarten to Grade 12 and identifies cultural understandings appropriate for each age group. Curriculum development initiatives are focused upon priorities as identified by the Department of Education and Yukon First Nations in areas where gaps in our present curricular resources exist.

First Nation Elders provide a wide variety of services to education in the Yukon. Elders participate in daily activities in some of our schools; they affirm curricular resources developed for language and cultural courses and they serve on a variety of steering committees leading the educational process.

The First Nation Curriculum Consultants provide support to Aboriginal Language teachers, classroom teachers and serve as a conduit between schools and the fourteen individual Yukon First Nations.

Other Language Programs

The French Programs mandate is to train and assist teachers in developing strategies, in adapting materials and preparing curriculum to meet the needs of Yukon students. French Programs oversees French First Language, French Immersion, French and other Second Languages such as German and Spanish.

French First Language

Under Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the goal of this program is to provide education to Francophone students who choose to be educated in their first language. A wide variety of subjects from K to 12 are taught in French with the exception of English that is taught beginning in grade 4. École Émilie-Tremblay is the Yukon's only French First Language school.

French Immersion

The French Immersion Program is for those students whose mother tongue is other than French. The goal of this program is to develop excellent linguistic competencies in French.

French Immersion students attend Whitehorse Elementary School for Kindergarten through Grade 7 and F.H. Collins Secondary School for Grades 8 through 12.

French Second Language

The goal of the French Second Language program is to provide students the opportunity to attain a level of comprehension of the language which will allow them to read, write and converse in French in simple terms. French as a second language is offered in most Yukon schools from primary through senior secondary classrooms.

German and Spanish

In addition to French, some Yukon secondary schools offer German and Spanish courses.

Yukon Communities

All communities except one (Old Crow) are accessible by all-weather roads, and travel is practical most of the year. Yukon schools are modern and well equipped, but such factors as isolation, severe climate and multi-graded classrooms may prove a challenge to the newcomer. Housing conditions and rental prices vary from community to community. Teachers can have an enjoyable lifestyle in any Yukon community.

Each Yukon community has its own unique demographic and cultural features. A brief description for each community is provided in this document. More detailed information about the Yukon can be obtained from visiting the Government of Yukon's web site at yukoncommunities.yk.ca.

Beaver Creek

Beaver Creek is the most westerly community in Canada, situated 458 kilometres northwest of Whitehorse on the Alaska Highway and 32 kilometres from the Canada-U.S. (Yukon-Alaska) border. The Canada Customs station is open 24 hours each day for vehicles entering Canada from the United States.

The area is the home of the White River First Nation, whose principal language is Upper Tanana (the language is taught at the school). Beaver Creek functions as a service centre for Alaska Highway travelers and the community has a nursing station, a curling rink, motels, a service station and a highway maintenance facility.

Beaver Creek School offers Kindergarten through Grade 9.

Carcross

Carcross is 72 kilometres south of Whitehorse on the Klondike Highway to Skagway, Alaska, and is situated at the north end of Lake Bennett, near the Yukon-British Columbia border.

Originally called Caribou Crossing because of the large caribou herd which crossed the lakes at this point, Carcross was a favoured hunting and camping site for members of the Carcross-Tagish First Nation. Today the Tlingit language is taught in the Carcross School.

Carcross was on the White Pass and Yukon Railway Company's route and functioned as a distribution centre for the mines in the area until the 1960s. It now acts as a service centre for the Klondike Highway with an increasing emphasis on tourism. Carcross has a hotel, general store, a highway maintenance garage, a service station, RCMP detachment, curling rink and ski trails.

The Carcross Community School offers Kindergarten through Grade 9.

Carmacks

Carmacks is 160 kilometres north of Whitehorse at the junction of the Klondike and Campbell Highways and at the confluence of the Nordenskoild and Yukon rivers.

Carmacks takes its name from George Washington Carmack, one of the discoverers of Klondike Gold in 1896, and the present location of the community is not far from George Carmack's trading post.

Most of the region's First Nation's people come from the Tatchun and Frenchman Lake area and Little Salmon Village. The predominant language of the group is Northern Tutchone.

Carmacks has a nursing station, a RCMP detachment, varied sports and recreational facilities, a part-time bank and full postal services. There are numerous historic sites in the area. The community has retail outlets and a full-service hotel.

Tantalus School offers Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Dawson City

The City of Dawson was the fabled centre of the largest gold rush in history. At the beginning of the century Dawson City was the largest city in Canada west of Winnipeg and north of San Francisco and until 1953, was also the territorial capital.

The Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation is located in Dawson City and belongs to the Han linguistic grouping (this is a linguistic term which recently has been replaced by the term Tr'ondek Hwech'in, which means, the people of the Klondike River). The people moved to the Moosehide reserve, just down river from Dawson, at the time of the Klondike Gold Rush. Beginning in the 1950s, the declining population at Moosehide caused the Han people to move back to Dawson, where they have become an integral part of the community.

The town is located 531 kilometres north of Whitehorse, at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike Rivers. Paved year-round highways connect Dawson with Whitehorse, Mayo, Pelly Crossing and Carmacks. Gravel roads connect with Tok and Eagle in Alaska and Inuvik in the Northwest Territories. Commercial air routes service the area.

The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Cultural Centre offers interpretive programs, tours, audiovisual presentations and photographic exhibits that explore and share the traditional and contemporary experience of the Hän People. The Historic Odd Fellows Hall is home to The Klondike Institute of Art & Culture (KIAC), featuring a public art gallery, instructional programs and performing arts venue offering a broad range of events and activities throughout the year.

Full medical and dental facilities are available in Dawson City. There is a RCMP detachment. There is a broad range of sports and recreational facilities and the local campus of Yukon College offers a wide range of courses. Local hotels offer fine dining throughout the year and several more are open during the tourist season.

Robert Service School, named for the celebrated Bard of the Yukon, offers Kindergarten through Grade twelve; the school year in Dawson City runs from mid-August to the end of May.

Destruction Bay – Burwash Landing

Destruction Bay (named by Alaska Highway builders for the furious storms off the Yukon's largest lake) is situated on the west shore of Kluane Lake about 250 kilometres from Whitehorse on the Alaska Highway. Burwash Landing is 19 kilometres northwest of Destruction Bay on an elevated terrace above the lakeshore.

The area served vibrant mining activity through the mid-1970s. Destruction Bay remains as primarily a highway maintenance camp. There is a community hall and curling rink, and the few residents are mostly employed by government or local tourism.

Kluane Lake School has a small enrollment in one classroom.

Burwash Landing is the chief settlement of the Kluane First Nation, whose language is Southern Tutchone. There is a lodge (summer only) and a museum, as well as a store and community hall. Students from the community attend the school in Destruction Bay. A 6,000-foot long runway is 2 kilometres west of Burwash Landing at a former Ministry of Transport facility.

Faro

Faro was built in 1969 as the residential area serving a large lead-zinc mine. The town is located 354 kilometres northeast of Whitehorse.

The mine is closed at present and the area population has declined. The community, however, is well served. Faro has a nursing station and a RCMP detachment. Recreational facilities are extensive. The Faro Recreation Centre includes a gymnasium, universal gym, fitness room, arts and crafts room, indoor skating rink and curling rink (artificial ice).

The Del Van Gorder School (named after a prospector and fur trader from the area) offers Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Haines Junction

Haines Junction is 160 kilometres west of Whitehorse at the junction of the Alaska Highway and the Haines road. It was founded after the building of the Haines Road to Haines, Alaska in 1943. The area, including the communities of Aishihik, Canyon, Champagne and Klukshu, is the home of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations, and the Southern Tutchone language is taught in the St. Elias Community School.

Kluane National Park has its headquarters and interpretive centre in this community. The village also has a health centre, a curling rink and arena, cross-country ski trails and a seasonal swimming pool. The community has a number of motels, hotels and service stations catering year-round to locals and tourists.

St. Elias Community School (named after a nearby mountain range) offers Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Mayo

Mayo is 409 kilometres north of Whitehorse and takes its name from Al Mayo, a prospector and trader who settled in the area at the turn of the century. Mayo became an important transportation link in the territory in the first half of this century, being the staging area for the transportation of minerals by water from the Elsa and Keno mining areas. During this time the original inhabitants – the Northern Tutchone people – continued to hunt and fish along the Stewart and Mayo rivers and the surrounding areas.

The First Nation of Nacho Nyak Dun operates a number of services for its people. The community has a Nursing station and a RCMP detachment. A grocery store, two motels and a restaurant also serve the Mayo area.

The J.V. Clark School provides Kindergarten through Grade 12 and houses the local Yukon College campus.

Old Crow

Old Crow is the most northerly Yukon community and is located 110 kilometres north of the Arctic Circle on the banks of the Porcupine River.

The present settlement was established as a trading post in the early 1900s. When a school was built in 1940 most of the people moved to the settlement from their hunting camps. Gwich'in is the language of the region and the people are known as the Vuntut Gwich'in ("People of the Lakes"). Many people depend on the meat obtained from the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which passes close to the village in its annual migration.

Old Crow is accessible by air service several times each week throughout the year and by water during the summer months. The Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation operates a co-op store which provides groceries and general supplies. A nursing station, RCMP detachment, Anglican Church, and Yukon College campus are found in the community.

Chief Zzeh Gittlit School offers Kindergarten through Grade 9. Many of the cultural activities of the area are integrated into the school curriculum, including Gwich'in language teaching, trapping and arts and crafts programs.

Pelly Crossing

This village is located on both sides of the Pelly River at its juncture with the Klondike Highway, approximately 212 kilometres north of Whitehorse. The majority of Pelly residents are members of the Selkirk First Nation. Their language is Northern Tutchone.

The community is centered in excellent fishing and hunting country. Trails exist for jogging and cross-country skiing. The Pelly River affords boating adventures of all kinds. Lynx, fox, rabbit, moose, and bear can be observed on walks around the community. Health needs are satisfied through the Nursing Station. Fields for softball, track and field and soccer are in the community and the swimming pool is open during the summer months.

Eliza Van Bibber School, designed by celebrated architect Doug Cardinal, offers Kindergarten through Grade 12.

Ross River

The community of Ross River is situated on the banks of the Pelly River, 406 kilometres from Whitehorse on the Campbell Highway. Before moving to this location the local inhabitants had traded with the fort established in 1903 at the mouth of the Ross River. A major change in living styles occurred in the early 1940's when the Canol Road and Pipeline were constructed. Many people came to work on these projects and some remained.

The Ross River Dena Council has been active in promoting cultural activities. The Kaska language is taught in the school and traditional activities such as trapping, fishing, hide tanning and craft work are still practiced.

The community has a nursing station, hotel, RCMP detachment, general stores, community arena and a Yukon College campus.

The new Ross River School, opened in September 2000, offers Kindergarten through Grade 10.

Teslin

Teslin is 182 kilometres south of Whitehorse on the Alaska Highway, and is situated on the shore of Teslin Lake. Of the inhabitants, approximately one-half are member of the Teslin Tlingit First Nation.

In summer the economy is based on tourism which features boating and fishing on Teslin Lake. Year-round employment is provided by services to the transportation industry, hunting, fishing and government services including a highway maintenance garage. There is a museum, a community club, a skating rink, a curling rink, a nursing station and a Band hall. There are motels, service stations and restaurants in the area.

Teslin School offers Kindergarten through Grade 9.

Watson Lake

Watson Lake is the Yukon's most southern community, located 459 kilometres southeast of Whitehorse on the Alaska Highway, and sits a few kilometres from the BC border on the 60th parallel. Before the Alaska Highway was built, the area was a stopover and seasonal home for the Kaska people. When the Alaska Highway was constructed in 1942, Watson Lake became a major air and road link, serving as the Gateway to the Yukon.

The Kaska people of the Liard First Nation are working toward settlement of their land claims and self-government agreements with the federal and territorial governments. Currently not a member of the Council of Yukon First Nations, the LFN is considering rejoining the Council, and has also been involved in establishing unity with other Kaska groups in the region.

Over the years Watson Lake has become an important centre for tourism, mining exploration, lumbering and communications. A wide variety of services are available including hotels, motels, a hospital, extensive recreation facilities, retail stores and a Yukon College campus.

There are two schools in the town: Johnson Elementary School offers Kindergarten through Grade 7 and Watson Lake Secondary School offers Grades 8 through 12.

Whitehorse

The capital of Yukon Territory since 1953, Whitehorse is the most westerly city in Canada, and with a population of 23,000, it is the largest Canadian city north of 60. It lies along the Alaska Highway, but historically, the more important transport route for Whitehorse has been the Yukon River.

Whitehorse takes its name from the treacherous rapids that used to lie just upstream on the Yukon River. Those rapids disappeared with the building of a hydroelectric dam. During the Klondike Gold Rush the rapids presented a formidable obstacle to river traffic. The White Pass and Yukon Railway from Skagway, Alaska chose Whitehorse as its terminus in 1900, and from here goods were transferred to the fleet of stern-wheeled steamers that headed down river to Dawson City and other river centres.

The river traffic, and the mining industry that it served, continued to be the reason for Whitehorse's existence until the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. American fears of a Japanese invasion through Alaska prompted the construction of the Alaska Highway. Within a few years, the town's population multiplied and the capital moved south from Dawson City. Within a few more years, all-weather roads connected all Yukon communities (except Old Crow. The river steamers were hauled out of the water for good.

Today, Whitehorse is a thoroughly modern city, with the amenities one might expect only in a community many times its size.

The Kwanlin Dun First Nation has cultural affiliations with the Northern and Southern Tutchone as well as with the Tagish from Marsh Lake but is also an amalgamation of many Yukon First Nation culture groups.

The Ta'an Kwach'an Council, who separated from the Kwanlin Dun First Nation, is affiliated with the Southern Tutchone Tribal Council and has members who are Southern Tutchone and Tagish. The traditional territory of the Ta'an is located around the Lake Laberge area, near Whitehorse.

Whitehorse has a vibrant cultural life, with an arts centre, theatre and dance companies, two cinemas, a busy music scene, and a number of nationally recognized visual artists. The sports community is equally active, with excellent facilities for softball, hockey, speed skating, cross-country and downhill skiing, swimming, racquet sports, curling, bowling, shooting, dogsled racing and many others.

The 2007 Canada Winter Games will take place from February 24 to March 10 in Whitehorse, Yukon. All three northern territories are partnering to deliver a pan-Northern approach to hosting the event.

Whitehorse is the headquarters for Yukon College, which also has campuses in many other Yukon communities. The Whitehorse campus is in the forefront of adult education, innovative northern studies, and northern scientific research.

There are 14 schools in and around Whitehorse. This includes 10 elementary schools, 3 secondary schools, and a French First Language school offering Kindergarten through Grade 12. There are two Catholic elementary schools and a Catholic Secondary school in Whitehorse. A number of students attending Whitehorse secondary schools come from rural communities. Some of these students reside in the department-sponsored Gadzoosdaa Student Residence.

Yukon's First Nations

According to southern Yukon tradition Crow created the world and human beings. In the beginning the whole world was water and Sea Lion owned the only island. Crow stole Sea Lion's baby and refused to give it back until he was given some sand which he sprinkled over the water to create the world. Then, because he was lonely, he carved women and men from poplar tree bark and breathed life into them.

Archaeologists have another explanation for how and when people came to the Yukon. They theorize that the first North Americans came to Northern Canada from Asia across a land bridge from Siberia during the Pleistocene Ice Age between 10,000 and 25,000 years ago. This bridge between continents, estimated to be 2,400 kilometres wide, was created when water taken up in massive icecaps caused world sea levels to drop.

Parts of northern Alaska and the Yukon remained ice-free during the last ice age and provided a haven for many animals and humans fleeing from colder regions. Archeologists suggest early aboriginal inhabitants of the Yukon hunted wooly mammoths, bison, horses and caribou. They lived in small family groups travelling with the animals.

Some of the earliest evidence of human activity in the New World has been found in caves on the Bluefish River near Old Crow in the northern Yukon. Stone tools and animal bones that have been found at this site may be 20,000 years old.

The cultural and linguistic tradition to which most Yukon First Nations belong is more than 1,000 years old. An archeological site near Old Crow has unearthed a spring caribou hunting site 1,200 years old which has provided evidence about the culture of early Athapaskans. It is believed these people lived in small groups and followed a regular cycle of seasonal activities. They hunted caribou, moose and mountain sheep in spring and fall and spent summers fishing for salmon.

Contact History

There were few permanent First Nation settlements in the Yukon until the turn of the century. However, a number of family groups were trading furs for tobacco, guns and other European goods by 1825. At first, the Tlingit acted as intermediaries between Athapaskans and Russian, American and British traders. By mid-1800, the Hudson Bay company and independent American traders had set up posts along major Yukon rivers. Most Yukon First Nations were able to continue to live their semi-nomadic subsistence lifestyle through this period, incorporating trapping and trading into their yearly round.

The Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 had a much more dramatic impact. More than 40,000 outsiders came across the mountain passes and down the Yukon River to Dawson City. Some First Nation people found work for wages packing supplies for gold seekers or working as deckhands or woodcutters for the paddle wheelers that plied the rivers to Dawson but most lived apart from the non-native newcomers. By 1900, the rush was over and hunting and trapping again dominated the economics of the First Nations until the late 1940's.

The next flood of outsiders came to build the Alaska Highway in 1942-43. An estimated 34,000 U.S. army personnel arrived the Yukon in April, 1942 to construct a series of airstrips and a highway to transport war supplies to Alaska. In the 1950's paddle wheelers were pulled from the water and First Nations families that had lived along the rivers and lakes moved to communities on the highways.

Changes in hunting and fishing regulations and declining fur prices made it more difficult to make a living as a hunter and trapper through the 1940s. Family allowances were introduced in the 1950s but were only available to families whose children attended school. When the federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs proposed changes to the Indian Act in the late 1960's, Yukon Indians organized to define their rights to land and resources. In 1973, they began negotiation of a comprehensive land claim settlement with Ottawa.

The recent history of the land claim process began in 1973, when a delegation of Yukon Indian People, headed by Elijah Smith, made a presentation to the Government of Canada entitled, "Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow". This document was more than a statement of grievances; in it, Yukon Indian People made clear their desire to protect their cultures and to develop economic opportunities for future generations. Twenty years later, in 1993, the Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA) was signed, setting the stage for the completion of modern-day treaties for each of the Yukon's 14 First Nations.

First Nation Final Agreements have been reached with nine of the Yukon First Nations to date and several of the remaining Yukon First Nations are at or near completion of their negotiations and are pending on resolution of some final issues.

As each First Nation reaches their Final Agreement, they also reach a Self-government Agreement (SGA). This agreement lays out the powers, authorities, and responsibilities of the individual First Nation government. The agreements provide for funding which support the delivery of programs and services at the First Nation level. Under the SGA the First Nation now has the power to make and enact laws in respect of their lands and citizens, to tax, to provide for municipal planning, and to manage or co-manage lands and resources.

First Nations Language Groups

The Yukon's First Nations presently constitute about a third of the territory's population. There are 14 First Nations in eight language groups.

Gwich'in

The Gwich'in people live in the northern Yukon along the Peel and Porcupine River systems. Before contact with Europeans, Gwich'in family groups were nomadic and relied on migrating caribou to provide them with meat, hides and other necessities of life. Working cooperatively, they constructed large caribou corrals or surrounds and herded animals into them for the kill. Old Crow is the major Vuntut Gwich'in community in the Yukon today.

Han

The Han people live along the Yukon River and its tributaries north of Dawson City. The mainstay of their pre-contact economy was salmon. The Han gathered in large groups along the river during summer to harvest, smoke and dry salmon. In winter they broke into smaller family units to hunt for game. The Han were the people most affected by the Klondike Gold Rush. Today, they are concentrated in Dawson City and several Han people still occupy the old Moosehide settlement down river from Dawson City.

Kaska

The Kaska people live in the mountainous headwaters of the Pelly and Liard Rivers in the eastern Yukon. They hunted caribou, moose and Dall sheep and traded furs with coastal Indians. Today, most Yukon Kaskas have congregated in the communities of Ross River, Upper Liard, Two Mile and Lower Post, BC.

Tagish

The Yukon's southern lakes are the traditional territories of the Tagish people. Their yearly round followed the movements of moose, woodland caribou, sheep and fish. In the 1800's they were drawn into the fur trade, acting as middlemen between coastal Tlingit and the inland Kaska and Tutchone. Over time many Tagish people adopted the Tlingit social institutions. Today, the Tagish people are found mostly in the Carcross area south of Whitehorse. As the Yukon's smallest language group, they are working hard to preserve their language.

Tlingit

The Inland Tlingit migrated into the southern Yukon from the Taku River area on the Alaskan coast over the past 100 years. They came to the interior to trade with the Athapaskans and quickly integrated with the Yukon Indians through intermarriage and trading partnerships. Teslin, Carcross and Atlin (in northern British Columbia) are home to most of the Inland Tlingit today.

Tutchone: Northern and Southern

The Tutchone people are found in the central Yukon in a large area stretching from Aishihik and Kluane lakes in the west to the Ogilvie and Selwyn Mountains in the northeast. Pre-contact Tutchone lived in semi-nomadic groups fishing for salmon and whitefish in spring and summer and hunting moose, sheep, and woodland caribou in the fall. Fur trapping and trading had become a central part of their domestic economy before 1900. The Tutchone are separated into two distinct language groups, with the Northern Tutchone being centered in Mayo, Pelly Crossing, Carmacks and Beaver Creek and the Southern Tutchone in Whitehorse, Haines Junction and Burwash Landing.

Upper Tanana

Most of the Upper Tanana people live in Alaska, but are related to the Yukon's White River First Nation, centered in the Beaver Creek area. Some White River people have been moving back to Beaver Creek. The Upper Tanana and Northern Tutchone languages are indigenous to the region.